



**FINAL DOCUMENT
OF THE CONTINENTAL
STAGE IN
EUROPE**

“How great is the beauty of a humble Church, a Church that does not stand aloof from the world, viewing life with a detached gaze, but lives her life within the world. Living within the world means being willing to share and to understand people’s problems, hopes and expectations.”

(Pope Francis)

European Continental Assembly: final remarks

We have experienced four days of listening and dialogue based on the resonances aroused by the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* within the Churches from which we come. As the European Continental Assembly, we realise that we have had a profoundly spiritual experience through the synodal method.

We give thanks to the Spirit who guided us for the gift we received and here we wish to share it. We deepened the insights that the ecclesial communities of our continent have gained through the synodal process, as well as the tensions and questions that the European Churches are facing¹. Above all, we once again felt the pain of the wounds that mark our recent history, starting with those that the Church has inflicted through the abuses perpetrated by people who were performing an ecclesial ministry or office. We have mentioned several times the ruthless violence of the aggression war disfiguring Ukraine. We thought about the victims of the earthquake that devastated Turkey and Syria.

Our work has been rich and exciting, though not without its problems and difficulties. It has allowed us to look into the eyes of the Church in Europe, with all the treasures of the two great Latin and Eastern traditions that make it up. With an awareness that has grown over the course of the Assembly, we feel today that we can affirm that our Church is beautiful, showing a variety that is also our wealth. We feel that we love her even more deeply, in spite of the wounds she has inflicted, for which she needs to ask forgiveness in order to be able to move on to reconciliation, the healing of memory and the welcoming of the wounded. We are convinced that these sentiments also fill the hearts of all the people who have been involved in the journey of Synod 2021-2024 since September 2021.

Throughout the days of the Assembly, we went through a spiritual experience that it is possible to meet, listen to each other and dialogue starting from our differences and beyond the many obstacles, walls and barriers that our history puts in our way. We need to love the variety within our Church and support each other in mutual esteem, strengthened by our faith in the Lord and the power of his Spirit.

This is why we wish to continue walking in a synodal style: more than a methodology, we consider it a way of life of our Church, of communal discernment and of discernment of the signs of the times. Concretely, we want this Continental Assembly not to remain an isolated experience, but to become a periodic appointment, based on the general

¹ Of this work will give account a more articulated document that will be sent to the General Secretariat of the Synod as a contribution to the next steps of the Synod process, and mainly the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synodal Assembly taking place in October. Together with a lot of information on our work and videorecordings of all the plenary sessions, this document will be available on the website of the Prague Continental Assembly, <https://prague.synod2023.org>, and on the websites of the Bishops' Conferences that wish to make it public in the different national languages.

adoption of the synodal method that permeates all our structures and procedures on all levels. In this style, it will be possible to address the issues on which our efforts need to mature and intensify: the accompaniment of the wounded, the 'protagonism' of young people and women, the learning from marginalised people, etc.

The synodal style also allows us to address tensions from a missionary perspective, without being paralysed by fear, but drawing from them the energy to continue along the way. Two in particular have emerged in our work. The first encourages unity in diversity, escaping the temptation of uniformity. The second links the readiness to welcome as a witness to the Father's unconditional love for his children with the courage to proclaim the truth of the Gospel in its entirety: it is God who promises "Love and truth will meet" (Ps 85:11).

We know that all this is possible because we have experienced it during this Assembly, but even more because the life of the Churches from which we come bears witness to it. We are thinking here in particular of ecumenical dialogue, which have echoed strongly in our work, and also of inter-religious dialogue. But above all, we believe that it is possible because grace is involved: building an increasingly synodal Church is a way to concretely implement the equality in dignity of all the members of the Church, founded in baptism. It configures us as children of God and members of the body of Christ, co-responsible for the unique mission of evangelisation entrusted by the Lord to his Church.

We are confident that the continuation of Synod 2021-2024 can support and accompany us, in particular by addressing at the level of the Synodal Assembly some priorities:

- deepen the practice, theology and hermeneutics of synodality. We have to rediscover something that is ancient, belongs to the nature of the Church, and is always new. This is a task for us. We are taking the first steps on a path that opens up as we go along it;
- address the question of an all ministerial Church, as the horizon of a reflection on charisms and ministries (ordained and non-ordained) and the relationships between them;
- explore the forms of a synodal exercise of authority, i.e. the service of accompanying the community and safeguarding unity;
- clarify criteria for discernment on the synodal process and which decisions belong on which level, from the local to the universal.
- take concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church and on their greater involvement at all levels, also in decision-making and decision-taking processes;
- consider the tensions around the liturgy, so as to synodally re-understand Eucharist as the source of communion;
- foster the formation to synodality of the whole People of God, with particular regard to the discernment of the signs of the times with a view to carrying out the common mission;
- renew a lively sense of mission, bridging the gap between faith and culture

to bring the Gospel back to people's feelings, finding a language capable of articulating tradition and aggiornamento, but above all, walking with people rather than talking about them or to them. The Spirit asks us to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth in Europe, and in particular the desperate cry of the victims of war who demand a just peace.

Loving the Church, the richness of its diversity, is not a form of sentimentalism for its own sake. The Church is beautiful because the Lord wants her to be so in view of the task he has entrusted to her: to proclaim the Gospel and invite all women and men to enter into the dynamic of communion, participation and mission that constitutes her *raison d'être*, animated by the perennial vitality of the Spirit. To build our European Church means then to renew our commitment to carry out this mission, even on our continent, in a culture marked by the many diversities we know.

We entrust the continuation of our Synodal journey to the Patron Saints and martyrs of Europe!

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Final Document

1. Introduction: The Experience of the European Continental Assembly

1. The European Continental Assembly met in Prague within the framework of a journey initiated in 2021: the Synod 2021-2024 entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*. The fruits of the first phase of the Synod, dedicated to the consultation of the People of God, which involved millions of people, have been summarised in the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS). This was in turn submitted to our local Churches – as well as those of each of the other continents – with the aim of gathering their resonances and facilitating a dialogue among the local Churches in Europe.

2. It was the first time in Europe that the People of God – bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated men and women, lay men and women - gathered to listen to one another and dialogue in an atmosphere of prayer and listening to the Word of God². It was a new and unexpected experience. The joy of being part of the Church, which we had previously experienced in the diocesan stage, flourished and multiplied. Everyone had the opportunity of getting to know realities different from the one in which they live.

² CCEE and UCESM (Union of European Conferences of Major Superiors) we invited communities of contemplative life from all over Europe to support the European Continental Assembly through prayer, in a special way with continuous silent Adoration.

Together we discovered our common adhesion to Christ. Sometimes we experience tensions and uncertainties, but we realize that trusting the Lord, we can go on walking together. After four days of listening and dialogue based on the resonances aroused by the *Working Document for the Continental Stage* (DCS) within the local Churches from which we come, as the European Ecclesial Assembly, we realise that we have had a profoundly spiritual experience through the synodal method. We give thanks to the Spirit who guided us for the gift we received and here we wish to share it.

3. We deepened the insights that the ecclesial communities of our continent have gained through the synodal process, as well as the tensions and questions that the European Churches are facing. Our work has been rich and exciting, though not without its problems and difficulties. It has allowed us to look into the eyes of the Church in Europe, with all its treasures, starting with those of the great Latin and Eastern traditions that make it up. In this journey of mutual listening, we realised that we can be united in diversity: *Diversity, which is not lacking – in history, culture, traditions, socio- religious contexts – is a great wealth. We have experienced the beauty of dialogue at 360 degrees, not only East and West, but also North and South, let us not forget: from Cyprus and Malta to the Nordic countries. We are exchanging precious gifts that generate fraternity and dispose us for mission* (Free intervention by an invited guest).

4. With an awareness that has grown as the Assembly unfolded, we feel today that we can confess that our Church is beautiful, a bearer of a vital diversity that is also our wealth. We feel that we love the Church even more deeply, in spite of the wounds it has inflicted, for which it must beg forgiveness in order to be able to pursue the path of reconciliation, heal memories and welcome the wounded. We are convinced that these sentiments also fill the hearts of all the people who have been involved in the journey of Synod 2021-2024 since September 2021.

1.1. The Composition of the Assembly and the Organisation of its Work

5. The Churches in Europe are characterised by a great variety of languages, cultures and rites. In all, the Assembly was composed of 200 people: 140 delegates from the 39 members of the CCEE³ (each one could nominate up to a maximum of four), to which were added 42 guests from the General Secretariat of the Synod, the CCEE Commissions, and a number of institutions, networks, associations and movements of the Catholic Church active on the continental level. In addition, each member of CCEE was invited to name up to ten delegates (numbering 269 persons) who participated online and contributed to the online working groups. In order to serve the work of the Assembly, members of the CCEE Secretariat and the General Secretariat of the Episcopal Conference of the Czech Republic, as well as the Redactional Committee of this Document and the Media Team attended the meeting⁴.

³ As far as CCEE members are concerned, the name of the country is simply indicated, except: the eparchy of Mukachevo, Ukraine (with the distinction between Greek-Catholic and Latin Church), and the two multi-national Episcopal Conferences: Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland) and the International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius (Serbia, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo). Working groups are indicated through the language they used.

⁴ The complete list of participants is available in Annex A.

6. After the publication of the DCS, each local Church had been invited to work with the document and provide feedback. In plenary the delegation of each member of the CCEE shared the feedback to the DCS gathered from the Churches within their territory. These reports were inspired by the guiding questions formulated in n. 106 of the DCS. Each local Church as well as the episcopal conferences organised the collecting process of reactions to the DCS and its presentation in the manner most suitable and appropriate to their context and circumstances.

7. The European Continental Assembly in Prague worked in five languages (English, French, German, Italian, and Polish). Following the opening session, the work⁵ was divided into three units, each of which was structured as a broad spiritual conversation: delegations taking the floor in the plenary assembly; sharing resonances in working groups; collecting and expressing reactions on the shared points in the plenary (group reports and free interventions). Delegates participating online were divided into groups that worked on a platform. They provided their contribution to the Assembly in a special session (online group reports).

8. Out of a deliberate option for transparency and with the aim to allow as many people as possible to participate in the journey, all the plenary sessions of the European Continental Assembly in Prague were live streamed. The recordings remain available on the YouTube channel of the CCEE Press Office.⁶ The presentations of the delegations, other interventions, speeches and homilies, as well as the reports of the working groups, are available on the official Website⁷ of the European Ecclesial Assembly in Prague. In order to hear the voices of the participants as much as possible on their own terms, the current Document provides quotations from the contributions shared. They aim to represent the richness, breath and lifelines of the exchange. The quotations were chosen because they express in a concise, powerful or precise way sentiments expressed in a number of contributions. They are not inserted to endorse a specific position.⁸

9. The presidency of the CCEE entrusted a Redactional Committee specifically with the task of drafting this Document. The work began by listening to all the contributions, reports and interventions presented during the Assembly and was based on the outline suggested by the General Secretariat of the Synod. An initial draft was read out during one of the sessions on the last day of the proceedings in Prague, and was approved by the Assembly. Reactions and proposals for modifications of this text were collected, both during the plenary session and in written submissions, were examined by the Redactional Committee and after necessary editorial work the document was completed.

10. The purpose of this Document is solely to provide a concise account of

⁵ The detailed programme of work can be found in Annex B.

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/@CCEEMediaoffice/streams>

⁷ <https://prague.synod2023.org/en/>

⁸ It should be noted that the reports submitted to the Assembly are oftentimes themselves already a translation of one language into one of the five working languages. This posed a specific challenge when using quotations.

the work of the European Continental Assembly. It offers the contribution of the Churches in Europe to the dialogue of the Church worldwide and to the drafting of the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synodal Assembly to be held in October 2023. It, therefore, voices the main intuitions and consonances recorded, as well as the divergences and tensions that did not fail to emerge, ahead of identifying the priorities to be submitted to the discernment of the Synodal Assembly which is currently being prepared. The European Continental Assembly acknowledged this report to be faithful to the work carried out. The Document does not offer solutions or theological interpretations, but rather intends to hold the tensions brought forward by the local Churches. It is not therefore to be interpreted as the expression of a final position nor as the indication of operational strategies of the European Churches concerning issues upon which discernment will take place in the subsequent phases of the synodal process.

11. After briefly outlining some basic elements of the context in which the local Churches in Europe live and work, in which, therefore, the Prague Continental Assembly should also be placed, the text will go on to identify seven intuitions that may underpin the path towards a synodal Church in a European perspective, and therefore seven tensions which the local Churches feel challenged by in order to continue their journey; it will then conclude with the formulation of what the Churches in Europe considers to be the priorities for the work of the Synodal Assembly in October 2023.

1.2. Some Features of the Context in which the European Churches operate

12. During the working sessions of the Assembly, we heard the news of the dramatic earthquake that hit southern Turkey and northern Syria on 6 February 2023. Tens of thousands of people lost their lives. The Assembly prayed for and expressed its solidarity with those particularly affected by the earthquake.

13. Europe is deeply affected by the pain and suffering of the war of aggression unleashed against Ukraine a year ago. The Assembly was deeply touched by the presence of people from the affected regions. The situation raised new questions: *We would do well, together with the whole Church, to reflect on how to show Christ in war and post-conflict conditions. How to reach people affected by violence and rape with the Good News?* (Ukraine, Latin Church).

14. The local Churches in Europe acknowledge the wounds caused by sexual and other kinds of abuse in its own midst. The report of Ireland echoed others when it stresses that the courageous voice of the victims *went to the heart of what is necessary for our Church: conversion* (Ireland). As the trustworthiness and credibility of the Church are at stake, there is a need to address both the cases of abuse and the wounds they cause, as well as the issue of their management by the Church authorities.

15. The synodal experience takes place within the peculiar context that

characterises the Church in Europe, starting from the diversities that run through it, which at times create tensions between its parts: between Eastern and Western Europe - a legacy of the division of the continent into opposing blocs at the end of the Second World War - , as well as between North and South, between countries that have a strong Catholic tradition and others where Catholics or even Christians have been a minority for centuries. Nevertheless, the work of the Assembly reveals a picture of Europe and the European Churches that is much more diverse than the traditional stereotypes of large homogeneous opposing blocs. The confessional pluralism that has characterised Europe for centuries is today the ground on which ecumenical initiatives of many kinds flourish, starting with ecumenism of praxis.

16. The religious context of contemporary Europe is marked above all by the phenomenon of secularisation: *our rich European Christian tradition also entails knowledge, which we carry in a very secularised context. Within this context, we need to pave new paths towards the desire to 'meet everyone with the burning lamp of the Gospel (Malta). A negative attitude that condemns the world and society is sterile. We have much to offer the world but we also have much to receive from it. Openness to the world can help us to better understand the Gospel. [...] The whole synodal process invites us to understand the signs of our time, also the signs of contemporary secularized society (Belgium). Current challenges include the need to engage in a dialogue with contemporary culture and thought, on issues such as artificial intelligence, robotics or gender identity issues (LGBTQIA+) (Portugal). Despite difficulties, the synodal process is considered to be a chance within a secularized culture: By enlarging our tent, we must be able to accompany as many people as possible on the path of the Christian experience (Monaco).*

17. Churches in Europe also have to deal with the problem of migration. It is caused by wars or disastrous economic situations. It removes members from Christian communities, impoverishing them and making them almost irrelevant. Moldova remarks that there are communities *which are in danger for various reasons, first and foremost poverty and the phenomenon of migration, of disappearing and seeing the transmission of the faith tradition interrupted.* Elsewhere, communities struggle in coping with a sudden influx of migrants, who may soon constitute a large majority: *The new reality of the Catholic Church in Greece: [...] Some parishes have a foreign majority (95% in the three parishes in the centre of Athens, in Rhodes, in Mykonos), with a small presence of Greeks. [...] Other parishes show a multinational makeup. Only on islands with a century-old Catholic presence are all Greeks. The problem is worsened by the fact that thousands of immigrants live in towns, villages and islands without the presence of a Catholic parish priest, and therefore without a Catholic Church life (Greece).*

18. On several occasions it was emphasised that the Churches in Europe are Churches of martyrdom. Some suggested to draw up a common European martyrology to *spread the memory of the martyrs of our continent and let ourselves be guided by their witness in order to grow in faith and fidelity to our Christian and*

Catholic identity (Free intervention of an invited guest).

19. Amidst such complex challenges, there is a need to revitalise listening to the Word of God: *It is essential that the Church gives the Word of God all the space it deserves, reintegrating the spiritual dimension into its ordinary life, in all its pastoral and also its governing activities* (France).

2. For a Synodal Church in a European Perspective

20. The discussion and exchange starting from the DCS have led to the identification of seven points of reference for the path of building a synodal Church in a European perspective. These are shared intuitions from which we can all draw inspiration and ideas for implementation in specific local contexts: 1) the spiritual dimension of synodality, in a perspective of a continuous conversion to Christ; 2) the rediscovery of the common baptismal dignity and its implications; 3) the essential between synodality and mission; 4) dialogue as a way of life of the Church; 5) the commitment to overcome prejudices and reconcile memory; 6) preferential attention to families, women and young people; 7) the adoption of the synodal method for all ecclesial processes.

2.1. Journeying with Christ, filled with his Spirit

21. The lifestyle of Jesus Christ, his kenotic existence in the service of humanity, is a path that every Christian and every Christian community is invited to undertake: *Conversion, understood as interior and exterior conformation to Christ the servant, should be the first and last criterion of the synodal journey, which shapes the style of the Church of the future* (Turkey). *The term 'synod' itself refers to the person of Jesus Christ: In our synodal journey, the image of the Church as a community of all the faithful of Christ was emphasised. The faithful who are with Christ, who said of himself: I am 'hodos' = the way (also: the truth and the life). [...]. Christians are 'synodoi' (Ignatius of Antioch). Thus, synodality is first and foremost 'con-Christianity'. And the 'synodoi' are all 'con-Christians'. That is, precisely because with Christ, and only on this Christological basis, all the baptised are 'synodoi' in the time of salvation, in the following of Christ and in service to their brothers and sisters, in their pilgrimage towards the risen Christ* (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

22. In a complementary manner, numerous interventions in the plenary and group works pointed to the Holy Spirit as the main protagonist and driving force of the synodal journey. This was emphasised by the Czech theologian Tomáš Halík in his spiritual introduction: *Above all, it is through spirituality - the spiritual experience of individual believers and of the whole Church - that the Spirit gradually introduces us to the wholeness of the truth. We experienced this directly during the Assembly in*

Prague, when we meditated with a Pentecost icon shared by the Slovakian Delegation: all those in attendance are united, even if the colours of their clothes are different. The image reflects what has been experienced: the diversity of opinions expressed is not an obstacle to the declared desire of all to be faithful to Christ and participate together in building a single Church of unity in diversity guided by the Holy Spirit, *cum Petro et sub Petro*.

23. Proceeding along the synodal journey requires *maintaining a spirit of continual discernment so that the Church can always be a place of personal and communal encounter with Jesus and his Gospel, and a starting point for mission* (Portugal). If Christ is our model and the Spirit is the source of power that inspires us, an attitude of conversion and the care of the spiritual dimension are indispensable to remain attentive to their voice. At the heart of a synodal Church can therefore only be a personal relationship with God: *Only when we have a personal experience of God the Father can we be brothers and sisters in Christ to one another, going into the world with the content of the Gospel and revealing the richness of faith* (Slovenia). Nurturing this relationship requires engaging in a journey of conversion that also involves the communities as a whole and beyond: *We believe that the foundation of all our actions, desires and proposals must be a personal and communal conversion and communion with Christ, with each other and with our brothers and sisters* (Spain).

24. Fidelity to Christ must also be lived as a spiritual union with those who have given their lives for the Gospel: *The martyrdom of men and women, consecrated or not, teaches us that communion is possible despite hard trials; that being faithful to God is the most beautiful witness that can be offered to humanity of all times* (Albania). *Indeed, Christian martyrs did not give their lives for a custom, but for Truth: for Christ* (Hungary).

2.2. Rediscovering the Common Baptismal Dignity

25. *In baptism we are grafted into Christ* (Slovenia). Numerous reactions to the DCS emphasise the link with Christ through baptism and the consequences deriving from it: *We are all called to holiness and share responsibility for building up the Church, the Body of Christ* (English language working group). *Therefore: We must recognise and reaffirm our common baptismal dignity as the basis for renewal of life and ministries in the Church. Every baptised person must become more aware of their identity, dignity and vocation in Christ. [...] Each vocation must be better understood and more widely appreciated if we are to cultivate the collegial nature of the Church* (Scotland). Many found the synodal process a very useful opportunity for a lived reappropriation of that notion: *The intuition that emerged strongly in this synodal journey was the rediscovery of the baptismal dignity and the common responsibility derived from it for the edification and mission of the Church* (Italy).

26. The equal dignity rooted in our common baptism has been pointed out several times. This theological affirmation takes on a more concrete and urgent dimension when it prompts us to reflect on the place and role of women in the Church: *The*

present synodal experience is an important sign of hope for many and encourages them in the common search for new credible paths. This includes the recognition of the dignity and vocation of all baptised people, especially women (Switzerland). In other words, the involvement of women is not a substitution for male scarcity, but a responsible implementation of the theology of the common priesthood of the faithful (Czech Republic). The challenge is even more crucial with regard to young people.

2.3. Synodality Serving and Enhancing Mission

27. Synodality has a constitutive missionary dimension. Discovering the dynamism of evangelisation and renewing themselves, our local Churches grasp that synodality and mission are interdependent and a permanent task for the Church. Synodality entails journeying together at different levels; it is a way and style of being a missionary Church and constitutes the framework of our participation in the divine mission: *If we take seriously the principle of synodality, then mission cannot be understood as a one-sided process, but rather as accompaniment in a spirit of dialogue, a quest for mutual understanding. Synodality is a process of learning in which we not only teach but also learn.* (Tomáš Halík, Spiritual Introduction).

28. Walking as a missionary synodal Church we meet companions whom we learn to love and appreciate because together we are called to bear witness to the love of God in a wounded world. The expectations of the people towards the Church are immense. The faithful want to shape this missionary Church and they want their opinion, their life experiences, their concerns, their suffering to be heard.

29. Being a missionary Church means at the same time to listen as followers of Christ, to see the existential wounds of people, humanity and creation, and to act to redress them: *A synodal Church can help to redress and bind these wounds. It can help us to be reconciled with ourselves, with God, with one another, and with creation* (Ireland). The DCS's emphasis on the diaconal character of a missionary synodal Church was warmly welcomed. To express its importance, the image of the Church as a field hospital often recurs.

30. Currently, there are many wounds in Europe and around the world: the war in Ukraine, people's existential crises, the degradation of the environment, the pandemic, and the wounds caused to people by the Church through abuse and any kind of violence, exclusion, or humiliation. *Many voices express gratitude for the document's focus on the pressing crises of the present. We think in particular of the existential crises of the protection of creation, climate justice, wars, poverty and disease. As the Church in Switzerland, we can credibly engage in these crises if we also work on our own internal problems and solve them* (Switzerland).

31. Synodality supports the Church in the process of becoming increasingly missionary, but it also quickly reveals obstacles and tensions that must be overcome or endured along the way. A synodal Church adopts different criteria for evaluation;

it does not avoid dialogue, but seeks it; it does not devalue, but strives to come out of its own security and question itself; it opens up spaces for experimentation and seeks subsidiary solutions, if necessary.

2.4. Growing as a Church in Dialogue

32. For the Church, dialogue is a way of life, with solid trinitarian and ecclesiological foundations, which must shape our relationships at all levels. This affects the relationships within and among our local Churches and concerns ecumenical, interreligious, and social relationships as well as interactions with all marginalised and wounded people.

33. Our local Churches are marked by a rich diversity, which is not always simple to live: people of different nationalities and ethnic groups live together, as well as faithful belonging to both Eastern and Western traditions. The Churches of Moldova, Romania and Ukraine express the challenges: *In a minority context, an additional difficulty is represented by the difference of cultures among Catholics belonging to the same ecclesial community, who experience the separation of traditions, languages and closure in the sense of belonging that generates division (Moldova). Nevertheless, diversity must not be seen only as a problem, but as a resource (the rites of the different Churches, the liturgy, the history and traditions of the national Churches in Europe, etc.). All these realities call for a transformation of our hearts, of the language we use in relation to today's culture. We all feel involved in the journey of encounter, which begins with our metanoia (Italian language working group).*

34. With respect to relations with other Christian denominations and religious faiths, it has been pointed out that in many parts of Europe, Catholics are a small minority and have a rich experience of what it means to think and live ecumenically, alongside Protestant or Orthodox Churches. Many local Churches are involved in dialogue with Judaism and in interreligious dialogue, especially with Islam (e.g.: Turkey, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania): *The ecumenical effort of the Catholic community in relation to Orthodox Christians (there are very few other Christians in the country) and the work on dialogue with Muslims as well as with the Jewish community are part of the life of the Church in a religiously and ethnically mixed society (Bosnia and Herzegovina).*

35. The Churches in the countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Europe are aware that they find themselves on the border with the Orthodox world or live together with the faithful of the Orthodox Church, who count for the majority of the country's population. Living together has not always been easy and there are still wounds to heal. The local Churches want to face this task: The synodal path has rekindled ecumenical awareness. *The Greek Catholic Church has the ecumenical vocation in its DNA and painfully feels the lack of Christian unity. We are not simply at the geographical border with Orthodoxy, but above all with our Orthodox brothers and sisters with whom we share the same ritual and cultural heritage. Naturally, we want to intensify our involvement in ecumenism with all confessions, but especially with*

our sister Church, showing a spirit of initiative and creativity, overcoming the wounds and injustices of the past through a genuine healing of memory (Romania).

36. The Churches of Western and Northern Europe benefit from their good ecumenical relations with the Protestant Churches. It was emphasised that praying as well as journeying together, should not be limited to the annual celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, but should go further, identifying new possibilities. The Latvian delegation, for example, told us about the tradition of an ecumenical Way of the Cross, which has been held in Riga on Good Friday for 18 years now and was also organised during the pandemic with the participation of the Lutheran and Baptist communities.

37. The style of dialogue also concerns relations with the secularised society: *In Europe [the] change takes a specific form due to the confrontation with an increasingly secularised society. In reality, homogeneous Christian societies no longer exist. It is not good just to observe this situation or to experience it as a threat and as something to be opposed to. As a Church, we live in the world, but not necessarily in a Christian world. This requires a change of mentality and a true conversion on our part (Belgium).* At the same time, in the face of secularism and pluralism, some express concerns that the teachings of the Church will be diluted and for example that the traditional understanding of marriage and family will change. These voices plead for the Church not to be worldly, even if it remains in dialogue with the world.

38. The local Churches in Europe are aware that it is necessary to enter and remain in dialogue with society. Dialogue with the world helps the Church to be missionary, to know and understand the sufferings and wounds of people and creation, and to act accordingly, first of all inside our communities: a tension has been detected *between the socio-ecological changes we demand from society in order to live together peacefully in justice, and the lack of our own capacity for conversion towards more justice, such as practicing a second-class status of women.* (English language online working group).. For the commitment to justice, peace and reconciliation, time is running out. It is insufficient to only name issues; there is an urgent need for discernment to be followed up with action.

2.5. Facing Open Wounds, Overcoming Prejudices, Reconciling Memories

39. The Church has inflicted deep wounds and at the same time has been deeply wounded. Many reports pay tribute to *women and men who have courageously come forward to speak out about sexual, institutional, emotional, psychological, physical and spiritual abuse by members of the Church (Ireland).* They also bring to the fore how the wounds caused by abuse have eroded the very credibility of the Church. Expressing disappointment for the dismissive and non-empathetic treatment of these people by the Church authorities, some ask: *“ To what extent is a distinction still made between the members of the institution and the institution itself? (Nordic countries).* Others see the responsibility for the cover-up of abuse cases as both individual and systemic: *There are serious individual faults; too many clergy members abused their*

power and those responsible, not least the bishops, covered up the atrocities. But there are also systemic causes of the abuse of power. We cannot deny them. We are determined to draw the spiritual and structural consequences (Germany). Some call for more decisive steps to address the problem in a more transparent way: abuse is an open wound and will remain a barrier to communion, participation and mission until it is fully addressed (Ireland).

40. Only when we listen to the voices that are often not heard, can we grow and discern. We wish especially to hear the voices of specific groups within the Church: the poor people, the marginalized people, those who feel left out or not welcome, the LGBTQ community, divorced and remarried people, migrants, and people whose lives did not turn out as they hoped for (The Netherlands). The link between synodal reform and concern for victims and marginalised people in the Church must be maintained: *In the struggles for the future of the Church, we want to put concrete people and their suffering first* (Multilingual working group). The sick and people with disabilities are often mentioned too. A number of delegations express an urgency to take steps, because many people and groups feel rejected, degraded and discriminated against in our Church, often unfortunately rightly so. They want safe encounters and honest dialogue at eye level. Time is pressing: We see the need for a real conversion! (Switzerland)

41. During the Assembly, not only differences of opinion emerged, but also mutual accusations. Nevertheless, for the Churches of Europe, the path of encountering and mutual trusting is still open: *We underline the joy of being on the same path, between countries and Churches of Europe, of being able to discover that we are all living different sufferings and experiences but common in the love of Christ* (French language working group). The Prague Assembly is not the end of this journey, but just a step beyond the beginning: we all need time for a deeper understanding of what others are saying, which is sometimes difficult for some to accept, and which requires further reflection, study, discernment, and listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who wants to lead us to a common future: *Let us walk together in the way the Spirit of God leads our Church: in many places, with many people, in many forms. It is a kairos of the Church to discover and shape its own synodality* (Germany).

42. The meeting and sharing among the delegates, particularly during the group work, made it clear that the differences in worldviews do not only run between East and West, North and South. Despite real differences between local Churches, it is not possible to draw a simplistic picture of a Europe anchored in old divisions. The report from Luxembourg mentions *the great gap between those who seek reform or even transformation and others who are afraid of change to the point of rejecting it. May these gaps make us curious to discover each other's arguments, may they make us vigilant to respect each other in order to build the future of our communities together, and not against each other, seeing in diversity a wealth.*

43. The call to conversion has resounded in the context of mutual prejudices on the

part of individuals or even entire communities, including local Churches. We all need to *recognise the diversity of living environments and historical experiences* (Croatia) to cleanse ourselves of the historical memory that prevents us from approaching one another with an attitude of openness and trust. *Reading the DCS we are fascinated by the global diversity of the realities of our common faith in Christ. The listening-expressing relationship has become more balanced, and we have all become more aware of the value of each one's specific way of expressing ourselves* (Romania).

44. Some delegates openly expressed the need for all of us to convert, purify and heal our memories in order to reconcile our local Churches and become more credible for secularised societies. We all need to confront our hard theological and pastoral positions to better respond to contemporary challenges. *The process of secularization has not caused the disappearance of Christianity, as some expected, but its transformation* (Tomáš Halík, Spiritual Introduction). There is a need for a kenotic ecclesiology, so as not to be afraid of the death of certain forms of Church: *Mission overcomes many problems, because it means going out of oneself. In the danger of losing, there is a greater possibility of receiving* (Italian language working group).

2.6. Attending to Families, Women and Young People

45. Many contributions underscored the need to support families. They are responsible for transmitting, strengthening, celebrating and living, the faith. Furthermore, they are also agents of evangelisation: *The most important place of formation is the family, which is in crisis for various reasons: pastoral efforts towards families must be emphasised* (Slovakia). *The family is the fundamental unit of society, in which we learn tolerance and mutual acceptance, and to which we can return to in times of crises. We are all called, therefore, to work for marriage and the family.* (Hungary). This commitment also has an ecumenical and interreligious dimension as Albania underlines: *The five religious denominations (Islam, Bektashi, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Catholics) officially recognised by the State have together formed an Interreligious Council. Beyond the monotheism that characterises us, what unites us most, and for which we think we can offer something to the people of today, are the human values we feel we share* (Albania). A special reference to families is made here.

46. The contributions of practically all the delegations devoted space to the topic of the participation of women and their role in the Church. *Many women communicated their pain at the denial of their participation in the life of the Church and spoke of feelings of exclusion and discrimination. Women play a crucial role in the life of the Church, but many men and women spoke of a Church that 'excludes' the fullness of women's gifts* (Ireland). This is one of the most frequently recurring points in all reports and finds expression in similar words. Belarus emphasises *the greater attention given to the role of women in the life of the Church. On the basis of the sacrament of Baptism, as members of the People of God with equal dignity, they must take their rightful place in the implementation of the Church's mission and*

activities. (Belarus) Luxembourg calls for *strengthening the role of women and their participation at all levels of Church life, finally taking into account their charisms and talents.*

47. Delegations call for being more attentive to young people, which are the present and not only the future of our Churches. *More than ever, young people are looking for belonging, authenticity and autonomy. Many suffer from depression and loneliness and no one really cares about them and listens to them. Young people are already in our Church now, not only in the future* (The Netherlands). Slovakia laments the *absence of young people in the life of the Church*, because they can teach the Church how to be a missionary Church. The Church needs young people *who accept this mission of Christ, who give witness, who conduct a dialogue, who present to other communities and nations all these values that we bring into our lives as young Catholics* (International Bishops' Conference of Saints Cyril and Methodius).

2.7. Building the synodal method into Church structures and processes

48. As the European Continental Assembly progressed, the awareness of the depth and fruitfulness of the method of spiritual conversation, also called by some the synodal method, came to the fore: *The synodal process is a gift of the Holy Spirit, who calls us to active listening, deep dialogue and community discernment through the methodology of spiritual conversation* (Spain). As the direct experience of the work of the Prague Assembly also testifies, spiritual conversation triggers a profound dynamic in the people involved: it allows people to be listened to and asks from them to learn to listen by leaving their prejudices behind, accepting different ways of expressing oneself, which at times may hurt. Above all, it stimulates deep personal and communal listening to the Word of God, community prayer and conversion. People realise that they listen to their 'brothers and sisters in Christ', but even more so, that they listen to the Spirit, who is the true protagonist. People are invited to be driven by the Lord's style, and not their own ideology, in order to identify together the steps to be taken. This is what the term discernment refers to, though for some it still needs clarification. With appropriate adaptation, the synodal method can also be applied to other areas of togetherness, especially in the social, interreligious or ecumenical context.

49. Synodality should not remain an abstract and formal idea. Hence, the synodal method *needs deepening, formation and institutionalisation* (Austria). On the one hand, a more thorough elaboration of a theology of synodality is needed; on the other hand, many emphasise the importance of *"formation in synodality, for clergy and laity together"* (England and Wales), especially through learning-by-doing processes. We can grow in a synodal style through practice, under the guidance of the Spirit and with the accompaniment of skilled people. Thus, the Maltese delegation asks: *Given the clear difference we observed between processes in which the 'spiritual conversation' was central and those that seemed to replicate normal surveys, what skills and what spirituality are needed for synodality not to remain just a concept, but to become an inspiration for our structures, so that they really become spaces of community discernment in which God's will is truly at the centre?* (Malta)

50. The use of the synodal method is, therefore, called to become structural, entering into the ordinary life of the communities *as the correct approach to each ecclesial meeting and to the implementation of local pastoral plans* (Moldova) to the point of shaping a new style of being Church. According to the Slovak delegation, it is a priority to *bring the synodal spirit into the life of local communities – to introducing active listening and spiritual discernment in decision-making / taking processes*. For this reason, there is a strong call to attend to canon law reforming the structures and processes that promote and protect the synodal method. One of the priorities is to make *parishes a place of true 'synodal culture' where all are invited to participate, to manifest themselves, to make their contribution to pastoral action, in councils or assemblies, assuming an effective co- responsibility* (Portugal). It is also a way to make the Church less clerical, cold and bureaucratic, as some, especially the young, are asking for.

51. It is a matter of continuing to learn how to be a synodal Church, building on previous experience, but not without being satisfied with the steps already taken, however beautiful they may be, by bearing concrete witness that it is possible to live tensions without seeing them as irresolvable oppositions that crush us. That is why *formation in the concrete practice of synodality and authentic listening to the other and to the Holy Spirit is necessary* (The Netherlands).

3. The European Churches Facing Synodality: Questions and Tensions

52. At the heart of the synodal process is the identification of the tensions that run through the Churches in Europe. As suggested by an Austrian delegate, tensions can be opportunities, but it depends on how one deals with them: they can be swept under the carpet, turned into a conflict with losers and winners, or become the road to synodality, which then requires opening up spaces for experimentation. *Europe has a history of religious conflict, but tensions are reduced when we listen to each other, so let us thank God for this process of synodal listening* (English language online working group).

53. Multiple tensions of various kinds are often a source of great concern. The image of the tent proposed by the DCS, however, makes it clear that they are not necessarily negative: without tension, the tent collapses, while too much tension damages it. Tensions risk turning into polarisations, but *polarization is wounding the Church, the body of Christ* (English language online working group). Yet, *Tensions can be overcome if the tent is a safe space where everyone feels they can speak and be heard. Spiritual conversation has been a useful practice in this regard* (English

language online working group). There is, therefore, an important challenge: to *inhabit tensions* (French and Italian language working groups). *Tensions allow us to have an opportunity for change in a more creative way, and together we can look for ways to succeed in doing this* (English language working group). Along these lines, some prefer to speak of complementarity or the ability to maintain a balance between polarities. This is how the seven tensions brought to the fore by the Prague Assembly should be grasped: 1) the relationship between proclaiming the truth of the Gospel and witnessing to God's infinite mercy; 2) the articulation between fidelity to tradition and aggiornamento; 3) the liturgy in the life of the Church; 4) the pluralism of understanding mission; 5) the ability to exercise the co-responsibility of all in the light of the diversity of charisms and ministries; 6) the forms of exercising authority in a synodal Church; 7) the articulation and unfolding of diversity and unity and the local-global dynamic.

3.1. Truth and Mercy

54. To express the tension between truth and mercy, some delegations resort to the DCS (nr. 30): *The dream is of a Church that more fully lives a Christological paradox: boldly proclaiming its authentic teaching while at the same time offering a witness of radical inclusion and acceptance*. Others, using a different language, speak of a tension between pastoral care and doctrine, to be addressed through an intensive dialogue involving the whole People of God.

55. In any case, the attitude of openness and welcome suggested by the image of the widening of the tent is considered a fundamental characteristic of a Church that is truly synodal and knows no boundaries: it is a token of its coherence. There is recognition of the urgency of a real closeness to all those who are poor, excluded, victims of injustice and prejudice, whose dignity is trampled upon: *It is not enough to proclaim that they are welcome, but we must discover with them their place in the Church* (Czech Republic). At the same time, the risk is perceived that this may lead to a watering down of the demands of the Gospel, whereas *the Church needs to communicate Christian truth authentically and clearly* (Hungary). Furthermore, fear is expressed that *considering pastoral solutions related to these issues could be a prelude to 'doctrinal changes'* (Poland).

56. Slovenia expresses two requirements highlighted often: *Young people want a Church close to people, including those on the margins, open to the issues of separated and remarried persons, LGBTQIA+ people. But they also want the Church to make it clear that not everything is acceptable! So the Church should listen, but also tell the whole truth with great love!* (Slovenia).

57. Both emphases are a way of responding to the need for authenticity of the disciples who wish to follow in the Lord's footsteps: *The convergence between the DCS and the discernment of the local Churches reinforces the concern for a Church open to all because its eyes are fixed on Christ: young people, the poor and excluded, people with disabilities, homosexuals, the divorced and remarried, everyone must*

feel that they are expected in the Church and that they have a place in it because they are members of the same body, that of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 12) (France).

58. Welcoming all as a sign of God's unconditional love and the proclamation of the truth of the Gospel are both demands rooted in the Church's unique mission: *God is the Truth, therefore he wants every person to be able to know this Truth and live it. [...] Jesus Christ alone is the only Lord and Saviour of the world. And the model of all interpersonal relationships is God in the Trinity of Persons* (Ukraine, Latin Church).

59. This tension cannot be resolved once and for all, but must be inhabited responsibly, resisting the temptations of ideological approaches and instead taking a step in the direction of greater spiritual depth: *The tension between pastoral and doctrine [...] can correspond to that between love and truth. Rather than opposing them, should we not rather articulate their complementarity in the sense of Psalm 85,10 'Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet'?* (French language working group). The path is that of a contemplative gaze that allows us to get to know the Lord Jesus better and the way in which he was able to articulate the two drives: *the fundamental truth of Jesus Christ is a moment of grace and mercy because mercy leads to truth* (English language online working group). This contemplative attitude is the basis for necessary discernment: *Unconditional acceptance does not prevent discernment in order to articulate mercy and truth in specific situations* (France).

60. Hence the need for a *formation in truth and mercy: a formation that holds in tension the authority of Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium and personal experience* (England and Wales). But even more fundamentally, we encounter here a call to personal and communal conversion: *While striving to enlarge the space of its tent and to be more inclusive, in what way should the Church modify itself, its doctrine, or its praxis? And to which extent should it ask its members to modify their heart and mindset, calling everyone for conversion? A shared journey of conversion becomes one of the first forms of inclusion* (Malta).

3.2. Tradition and Aggiornamento

61. *Perhaps the most pervasive tension in Europe is the growing divide between the Church and secular culture. To bridge this gap, the language of the Church must be accessible to all, without diluting the Gospel message* (Scotland). *We must realise that the language of faith as used in the Church is often very different to what people understand and use in everyday life in today's society* (Netherlands). As a consequence, the question *What does Jesus Christ want from his Church today?*, formulated by the Portuguese delegation, was repeated several times and in different forms.

62. The fear of breaking away from tradition particularly emerged when dealing with differences among theological sensitivities on the relationship between reference to tradition and reading the signs of the times. *The gap [...] between tradition and modernity is becoming increasingly wide and more and more aggressive. This is particularly painful in the area of liturgy* (Nordic countries). Indeed, for liturgy – and

not only liturgy – it is important to use a language that adheres to tradition while being significant for the people of our time.

63. Many delegates called for quick and radical changes following the meeting between theology and contemporary culture: *We must become a Church of presence, a Church that listens and is listened to. Transforming the Church without just turning around ourselves, having a view for the world. [...keeping] a double dynamic: a process of internal reform and a response to the challenges of today's world while renewing and maintaining our Christian identity* (Luxembourg).

64. Others expressed the concern that adopting changes would risk the integrity of the Church's teaching. For example, the Romanian delegation *hopes that the Church will be open to dialogue with the world without becoming of the world. That Church members speak boldly and uncompromisingly on matters of faith and morals,* Some remarks voiced the fear of inappropriate reforms of the Church, which may dilute the message of the Gospel: *We believe it is not right for the Church to conform to the world just so as not to feel persecuted, or considered unfashionable* (Albania).

65. Living the tension between tradition and aggiornamento without being crushed requires the ability to articulate the dynamic between the two poles: *We all would like to develop and implement new ideas, but we need to find a balance between Church traditions and new thoughts* (Estonia). *The pressing problem seems to be finding a wise consensus among the divergences and pastoral solutions that, without compromising doctrinal consistency, will allow a more adequate response to contemporary pastoral challenges* (Poland). In order to succeed, it has been stated that *serious attention must be paid to the theology of the living Tradition (DV 8) which includes, yes, a historical memory, but also an accurate discernment and judgement aimed at the new challenges of our society. The starting point, therefore, is found in listening to the Holy Spirit and discerning the signs of the times (GS 4), which courageously proceeds beyond historical experience* (Czech Republic). Synodality cannot be manipulated and bent to support ideological stances, nor does it consecrate all opinions expressed during the consultations. Rather, it is a dynamic way of listening to one another, humbly and opening our hearts to what the Holy Spirit suggests.

3.3. Liturgy as a focal point to observe tensions in the Church

66. The centrality of the liturgy, which gathers and fosters all the life of the Church, makes it a mirror in which the community – including its tensions – is reflected. Significantly and challengingly for discernment in Europe, liturgy is very often mentioned in connection with complex tensions or with pastoral difficulties. Instead, the joy of the liturgy in general and of the Eucharist in particular is rarely expressed. Perhaps this is so obvious that it goes without saying, but it is worth questioning.

67. From a fundamental point of view, it is possible to detect the link between

Church and liturgy, between ecclesiology and the theology of liturgy: *The liturgical dimension in the Church is a place of strong tensions. These tensions are part of a deeper tension of an ecclesiological nature. Ecclesiological tension often arises from a vision of the Church based on one's own expectations* (Italian language working group). In this context, the tensions and sufferings concerning the ancient form of the Roman liturgy should be understood, with explicit references by France, England and Wales, and Nordic countries to the pre-conciliar liturgy according to the 1962.

68. Several times the liturgy is mentioned in relation to the sacraments of Christian initiation, and in particular with Confirmation, which poses a great challenge in those contexts where it does not correspond to a deeper insertion into the life and mission of the Church, but to a distancing. In several countries, there are calls for reflection and action for a renewed liturgical language, and more profoundly for a renewal that articulates the mystery of faith and liturgy, on the one hand, and the relationship between liturgy and life, on the other. *Some of the faithful note that in general in Bulgaria, priests and the Church do not use contemporary language, while times have changed and the churches are half empty* (Bulgaria). Elsewhere, there is also a tension between the desire for spirituality and an overly formal liturgy. A particular problem concerns the homily. *This is linked to the need to pay attention to the formation and support of priests, who must be close to the People of God, also expressing the closeness of the whole Church through the simplicity of preaching, which must be there everywhere* (Mukachevo).

69. In conclusion, *liturgy is the space where we let God call us as one people and empower us by His Spirit to join in Jesus' mission. We need to deepen our understanding on how the way we celebrate our liturgies can further form us as a synodal Church* (Malta).

3.4. Understanding the Mission

70. At a deeper level, the above tensions are linked to the understanding of mission: *We are being convoked for what? Some might mix belonging to the Church with retreating into a comfortable cocoon. Others can imagine it more of a space where everyone can mix and match without any sense of commitment or conversion. For some of us, it's not clear what mission entails. And if it's all ministerial, how are we to understand the specific gifts of the ordained within the one holy People of God?* (Malta). A process of maturation is needed concerning the implications of these tensions: *Generally speaking, it seems that there is a need for a more complete appropriation and assimilation of concepts such as 'missionary nature' and the 'missionary dimension' of the activity of the Church* (Ukraine, Greek Catholic Church). In the tension around the understanding of mission, different interpretations become visible: some local Churches consider that the task of a missionary Church is the strengthening of catechesis and the growth of religious practice; others understand mission as going out into the world to make God's love tangible for all people, especially for marginalised and those who were hurt by the Church; others again add that the Church should be a home for all people, especially the young. In short, one

perceives a tension *between being locked in one's own community (elitism) and the need to go out on mission (Slovakia).*

71. A tension in the understanding of mission is also evident in the contributions from local Churches that are severely affected by cases of sexual abuse. How can the Church be missionary when it has inflicted severe suffering on many people? It touches on the credibility of the Church. Acknowledging the pain of the victims, the serious tensions are recognised and voiced. Finally, also among the mission-related tensions, *the fear is expressed that the synod process will remain without concrete structural consequences, which are seen as a prerequisite for a credible mission (Austria).*

3.5. Co-Responsibility of All, in the Diversity of Charisms and Ministries

72. *The synodality of the Church also requires recognition of the gifts and charisms of each member of the faithful, the equal dignity of each, seeking the symphonic articulation of the different vocations within the Church. It is necessary to recognise the authority of the pastors and the mission they have received. It is equally necessary to recognise the sensus fidei of each believer, whether cleric or lay. Rather, the ordained ministers can be understood as serving the baptismal life, granting each baptised and confirmed believer full participation in the life and mission of the Church (France).*

73. One of the most visible manifestations of common priesthood and synodality is the exercise of specific ministries and leadership, as well as participation in the governance of the Church at all levels. It is a way of realising the co-responsibility of all the baptised for the mission of the Church, based on their common baptismal dignity. This is why we speak of a ministerial Church as a concrete challenge, first of all for our ability to imagine concrete forms for its realisation. The synodal process leads to the desire of *a fraternal Church with an exercise of authority that is adapted to it and excludes every form of abuse of power, a synodal Church without clerical deviations (Belgium) in the exercise of all ministries, ordained and non ordained: In an 'all ministerial' Church, rethink the task and identity of priests (Italy); or, with a different emphasis: The involvement of the laity is an opportunity to complement, but not replace, the mission of ordained persons (Hungary).*

74. In this perspective, the Prague Assembly reaffirms that *the priestly ministry is a great gift from God for the Church (France) and in various ways expresses a deep concern for priests. It voices their wish for a positive image of priests (Austria) and the faithful's concern for the wellbeing and loneliness of priests. Young people observe that priests for the most part are poorly trained to work with persons, but are also often alone and without the right interlocutors (Slovenia).* On the other hand, there is a lack of reflection on the ordained diaconate, except in those cases where its opening to women is envisaged.

75. Some contributions also point to the existence of questions concerning the

limits of access to ordained ministry: *The historical variability of the figure of the priest must be open to debate about the ordination of married men* (Czech Republic). Another concern is the ordination of women to the diaconate, even though this is not a simple topic. *There are also tensions concerning so-called divisive issues, such as women's access to the sacrament of Orders, ordination of married men* (Portugal). In particular, *opinions are divided on the ordination of women to the diaconate/priesthood* (English- language working group). According to Luxembourg, *The question of women's access to ordained ministries must be studied in depth*.

76. More broadly, the question of the place of women in the exercise of authority came up in many delegations. *The question of women's priesthood is not a hot topic, but we have had many discussions about women's participation in decision-making* (Lithuania). For several groups it is even a condition for a more fruitful Church in Europe. *Without doubt: the participation of lay people and especially women at all levels in the Church is felt as a priority [...] the Church needs the voice and specific leadership and community building qualities of women* (The Netherlands).

77. In any case, a great convergence appears: *Promote the real and effective co-responsibility of the People of God, overcoming clericalism. It is important to promote lay ministries* (Spain). This is not just a question of the place of women in the Church, but an understanding of the diversity of ministries as an expression of the synodal nature of the Church.

78. This calls for a deepening of the issue of collaboration between priests and laity in the mission of the Church: *What is still missing is not only the experience of a community of life, but also a healthy collaboration between priests and laity* (Lithuania). Many interventions identify it as a place of tension or frustration, even going so far as to see it as a tension between institutions and charisms. Therefore, *it seems important to model cooperation and the assumption of ministries on the basis of capacities* (Nordic countries).

79. For this collaboration to be fruitful, there is an insistence on the need for specific formation, for seminarians (initial formation), for priests (ongoing formation), and not only: *The formation of all the baptised is indispensable to help them rediscover the meaning of their vocation and their task in the Church, in a logic of co-responsibility and not of substitution* (Italian language working group). This formation must be permanent and involve priests and laity together, which requires the creation of spaces and opportunities for experimentation. Lastly, the Turkish delegation was the only one to mention the training of priests from abroad, a phenomenon that affects almost all European countries, *who must learn the language and culture very well in order to be able to incarnate and embody the Good News in the local culture* (Turkey).

3.6. The Exercise of Authority within a Synodal Church

80. The contributions addressed various aspects of the exercise of authority in

the Church. They express that a true ecclesial and missionary renewal aimed at by the current synodal process is rooted in two principles: all specific authority in the Church proceeds from Christ, and is guided by the Holy Spirit. *Any real renewal and strengthening of synodality of and in the Church must start from the fundamental principles of the Church itself, from the foundations on which the Church was founded by Jesus Christ our Lord* (Nordic countries). The consequences touch the very nature of the Church, in which the Holy Spirit is still at work today. *The Church is essentially synodal and essentially hierarchical. The tasks and challenges involved can be described as 'decision-making' and 'decision-taking'. There must be no winners or losers. [...] The Holy Spirit is often the third option* (Austria).

81. *There are rigidities to be overcome: excessively top-down ways of understanding the exercise of authority, forms of clericalism at various levels (and not only among priests), forgetting that when something concerns everyone, it should be discussed with everyone. Those who have a responsibility in the community have the task of involving and valuing everyone's contribution, because we all have something to learn from each other* (Italy). Moreover, the common priesthood of all does not contradict the ministerial priesthood, and vice versa. *We already experience joint deliberation in the synodal process. How do we also take decisions together?* (Germany).

82. This must result in profound changes: *A synodal institutional model should be built for the exercise of the ecclesial power and authority, with structures and bodies that reflect the spirit of synodality [...] and that do not have only consultative functions* (Mukachevo). *Synodality seems to require a profound change of mentality in the Church and especially in all those who exercise a responsibility in it* (Belgium). *At the same time, the faithful must be more aware that they are part of the Church and that they are needed for the work of the Church, remembering that the diversity of charisms without a hierarchical order becomes anarchy, just as the strictness of the hierarchy without a living charism becomes dictatorship* (Mukachevo).

83. This change must be reflected in concrete decisions, which the Church shall have to discern. *This will demand the courage and wisdom of the Spirit to review and inspire any necessary doctrinal, structural, canonical, and pastoral changes, without destroying communion or losing sight of the person and teaching of Jesus Christ* (Ireland). Surely the bishops are key players in this change towards a renewed and synodal exercise of authority. *We believe in the value of episcopal ministry* (Italy).

84. Authority must be deployed in a more fraternal and participative governance: *In order to experience better governance in the Church, many are calling for a rethink of a more participative governance, which gives room for listening and discernment, conceiving authority as an act of love and service* (France), but a tension between authority and ministry is also pointed out (Multilingual working group). European societies also have some specific needs: *to be a trustworthy and credible partner in the public arena and with the people, the European Church must meet the standards*

of functioning and governance acquired in society (DCS 62). Hence the need for transparency, accountability and participative leadership (DCS 79) (Belgium). For this, mechanisms of regular consultation between clergy, laity and religious should be established or renewed, ensuring transparency, better communication and co-responsibility (Scotland).

85. The most essential feature noted by many contributions is the link between authority and listening. The theological tradition refers to it with the notion of *sensus fidei fidelium* (the sense of the faith of the faithful). The Synod 2021-2024 places renewed emphasis on it and this *a cause of great joy, encouragement, and hope for all who love the Church as the People of God* (Ireland).

3.7. Unity in Diversity: Between Local and Universal

86. In Prague, the Churches of Europe had the privilege of experiencing unity in diversity. *The diversity in the Catholic Church is a richness, as we know there are two lungs, the Eastern Catholic Lung and the Western Catholic lung, each has its own way of thinking, its own way of speaking, even of governing* (Cyprus). The synodal journey provided an opportunity to realise and appreciate this diversity: *Although coming together and engaging in dialogue has not always been easy, many Russian Catholics have perceived the synodal process as enriching and helpful. It has enabled them to discover that the Church, in Christ, is one family and that being multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-institutional is a wealth* (Russia). There is thus a call to take more account of the diversity of ways of living in the faith, which, in our opinion, is expressed well in the appreciation of traditions, both ritual and theological, that are at the same time united on the foundation of the one faith of the universal Church (Mukachevo). The Eastern Churches have preserved institutions that give expression to synodality: *They can bring a lot of positive elements to the understanding and unfolding of the Church's synodality, especially through the adaptation of already existing provisions of the governing of the Church sui iuris* (Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church). However, the Eastern Churches too are invited to renew existing institutions and recover institutions that have disappeared or fallen into disuse. *Required is not only the desired synodal conversion in the communion of the Church, but also the possible revision of some canonical norms so as to better reflect the identity of this Church and facilitate and support its mission both in its canonical territories and in the diaspora* (Romania).

87. The call to live unity in diversity also arises when the Churches face topics that concern a specific context at a specific time and which might, therefore, demand a contextual response: this is the question of decentralisation in a Church that is both local and universal. There is a need for clarity and transparency on who can decide which issue should be handled locally, regionally or universally. On each level the discernment should occur in a synodal way. Numerous contributions ask for appropriate institutions and canonical structures to assist the Church in putting synodality into practice.

88. In light also of the positive experience of the Prague Assembly a specific proposal was made to establish an Ecclesial Assembly for Europe: *It could take place in 2025. Sixty years after the Ecumenical Council proclaimed the Pastoral constitution Gaudium et Spes, this Ecclesial Assembly could gather to share 'the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time'. We could listen to the cry of the poor and the Earth in Europe and the world, we could pray and work together for Justice and Peace.* (Invited guest).

4. Perspectives and Priorities

88. Throughout the days of the Assembly, we went through a spiritual experience that led us to realise, for the first time in our Church in Europe, that it is possible to meet, listen to one another and dialogue starting from our differences and overcoming the many obstacles, walls and barriers that history has placed across our way. We need to love the diversity within our Church and support one another in mutual esteem, strengthened by our faith in the Lord and the power of his Spirit.

89. This is why we wish to continue journeying in a synodal style: rather than a methodology, we consider it a way of life of our Church, of community discernment and discernment of the signs of the times. Concretely, we want this European Continental Assembly not to remain an isolated experience, but to become a regular event, based on the general adoption of the synodal method that permeates all our structures and procedures at all levels. Doing so will allow us to address the issues on which our efforts need to mature and intensify: the accompaniment of wounded people, the protagonism of young people and women, openness to learning from marginalised.

90. The synodal style also makes it possible to deal with tensions from a missionary perspective, without being paralysed by fear, but drawing energy from them to continue along the path. Two in particular emerged in our work. The first encourages unity in diversity, escaping the temptation of uniformity. The second associates readiness to welcome others (as proof of the Father's unconditional love for his children) with the courage of proclaiming the truth of the Gospel in its entirety. It is God who promises 'Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet' (Ps 85:10).

91. We know that all this is possible because we have experienced it during this Assembly, but even more so because the life of the Churches from which we come bears witness to it. We are thinking, here in particular, of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, the echoes of which resonated strongly in our work. But above all, we believe that it is possible because grace is involved: indeed, building an increasingly synodal Church is a way to give concrete expression to the equality in dignity of all the members of the Church, founded in baptism, which makes us as children of God and members of the body of Christ, co-responsible for the unique

mission of evangelisation entrusted by the Lord to his Church.

92. We are confident that the continuation of the Synod 2021-2024 can support and accompany us, particularly by addressing some specific priorities at the October 2023 Synodal Assembly:

- deepen the practice, theology and hermeneutics of synodality. We need to rediscover something that is ancient and belongs to the nature of the Church, while always being new. This is a task for us. We are taking the first steps along a path that opens up as we walk it;
- address the meaning of an all-ministerial Church, as a horizon in which to place the reflexion on charisms and ministries (ordained and non-ordained) and the relations between them;
- explore forms for a synodal exercise of authority, namely the service of accompanying the community and preserving unity;
- clarify the discernment criteria for the synodal process and at what level, from local to universal, decisions are to be made.
- take concrete and courageous decisions on the role of women within the Church and on their greater involvement at all levels, including in decision-making and taking processes;
- consider the tensions around the liturgy, so as to consider, from a synodal perspective, the Eucharist as the source of communion;
- care for a synodal related formation of the entire People of God, with specific attention to discerning the signs of the times, with a view to carrying out the common mission;
- renew the living sense of mission, overcoming the rift between faith and culture in order to once again bringing the gospel to people's heart, finding a language that can articulate tradition and renewal, but above all that can walk with people instead of talking about them or to them. The Spirit asks us to listen to the cry of the poor and the earth in our Europe. In particular the desperate cry of the victims of war call for a just peace.

93. Loving the Church and her rich diversity is not a form of sentimentalism for its own sake. The Church is beautiful because the Lord wants her to be so, in view of the task he has entrusted to her: to proclaim the Gospel and to invite all women and men to enter into the dynamic of communion, participation and mission that constitutes her *raison d'être*, animated by the perennial vitality of the Spirit. Loving our Church in Europe, therefore, means renewing our commitment to carry out this mission, also on our continent, in a culture marked by the many differences we are well aware of.

94. Let us entrust the continuation of our synodal journey to the Patron Saints and Martyrs of Europe!

Adsumus Sancte Spiritus!

Concluding Note from the Bishops

We thank the Lord for the experience of synodality which has seen us all - bishops, priests, consecrated and lay men and women - side by side for the first time on a continental level. We rejoice because during these days in Prague we found that the moments of prayer lived together and even more the work of the Assembly have been a profoundly spiritual and truly synodal experience. Mutual listening, fruitful dialogue, and the story of how our ecclesial communities lived out the first phase of the synodal process and prepared for this continental meeting are an unmistakable sign of our unique belonging to Christ.

The national reports, the group work, and the many interventions that we have heard converged into the final document presented to the Assembly. It will be the contribution of the Churches in Europe to the drafting the *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synod. We thank those who have shared their experiences frankly and with respect for different sensitivities. We are also grateful to the Redactional Committee for the great work done in drafting the document.

As a fruit of this synodal experience, we bishops are committed to keep living and promoting the synodal process in our diocesan structures and life. This experience of care for the whole Church in Europe heartened us in our commitment to faithfully live out our universal mission. We are engaged in supporting the indications of the successor of Peter, our Holy Father, to become a synodal Church nourished by the experience of communion, participation, and mission in Christ.

We want to walk together, as holy People of God, both lay persons and pastors, pilgrims along the roads of Europe to proclaim the joy of the Gospel which springs from the encounter with Christ. We want to do it together with our brothers and sisters from other Christian denominations.

We shall work tirelessly to enlarge the space of our tents so that our ecclesial communities become even more places where everyone feels welcome.

Prague, February 11, 2023
Memory of the Blessed Our Lady of Lourdes